



Glass Ireland

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2024

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Jesse Günther, *Oscillating Bells*, 2023. Glass, steel, felt, rubber, 80 x 55 x 55 cm. Photo © Maximilian Schertz & Ömer Akdağ



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H10 x L26 x W11 cm. Photo © Philip Lauterbach



A.E. Child, *Artists and Glaziers at work in the An Túr Gloine Studio*,
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Stained Glass

Inspiring Awe and Wonder

Words by Jessica O'Donnell

Stained glass is a fascinating medium. The Hugh Lane Gallery has a superb collection of work by exemplary stained-glass artists including Harry Clarke, Wilhelmina Geddes, Evie Hone, Michael Healy, James Scanlon and Paul Bony. On entering the space, the darkness of the stained-glass room and the colourful luminosity of the work encourages a sense of enveloping stillness despite the room's close proximity to the bustle of the Entrance Hall.

The beauty and immense technical skill of Harry Clarke's masterpiece *The Eve of St Agnes* inspires awe and wonder. The window is a multisensory marvel: colour, light, music, poetry, texture, movement, temperature, sound, emotion, water, air, dream, reality, danger, expectation, hope, the distant past, urgent present and uncertain future are evoked in both poem and stained glass. *The Eve of St Agnes* window can be looked at over and over again and each time the brilliance of Clarke's vision reveals something new.

Audiences from early years to children, teens and adults have explored and are inspired by our stained-glass collection through art talks, tours, poetry writing, choral music, sketching, performances, glass-block making, a city-wide schools programme, film screenings, printmaking, community displays, artist-led workshops, study mornings and more.

One of the motivations for writing my own book *Harry Clarke The Eve of St Agnes* a number of years ago was not only to celebrate this work but to help audiences 'read' the window and more fully appreciate the complexity of Clarke's iconography. Observing that visitors were rightly dazzled by the overall 'revel in blue', they often didn't perhaps know where to start or, for example, that the sitting buddha-like figure with martyr's palm represented St Agnes herself. Presenting the window panel by panel was one way to encourage 'slow looking', the noticing of marvellous details such as stained glass within stained glass, etched moonbeams, starlight and jellyfish, and share how brilliantly Clarke distilled the forty-two stanzas of John Keats's poem into the jewel-like panels we see.

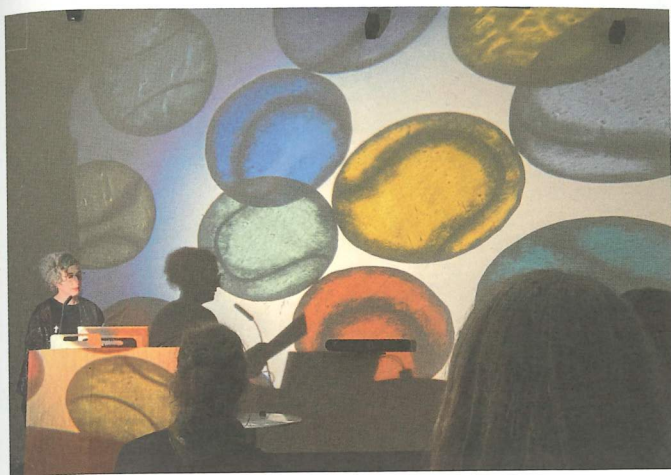
Clarke lived and worked in North Frederick Street and a recent collaboration with neighbouring school Gaelscoil Coláiste Mhuire

on Parnell Square saw every class in the school visit the Gallery to view the work of Harry Clarke, their chosen artist-in-focus. Tamao Oka, one of the many talented artists on our art education panel, led the visits for the junior and senior infant classes and colourful, sensory and tactile approaches were thoughtfully created by her to playfully engage the very young with Clarke's work. We firmly believe that it is never too early to experience all that a gallery has to offer and early years initiatives are part of a core strategy of our education programmes.

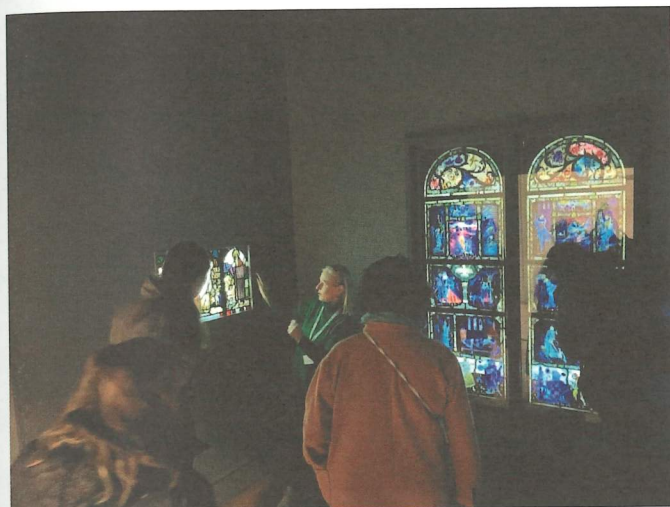
Harry Clarke's work also resonated with teens in our *Young Visionaries* TY programme where, over the course of the three months' project led by Allison Carey, students curated an exhibition drawn from the Hugh Lane's collection. *The Magic Glasses* preparatory watercolour for the *Geneva Window* was one of the artworks selected. As one of the students observed:

The true message of the piece is that we should acknowledge and appreciate our present moment. Rather than turning to escapism to deal with our problems, we may be better served to rely on the creativity we fostered as young people to conjure our ideal vision of the world; to create opportunities for a brighter future, instead of getting lost in 'magic glasses'.

It is also very encouraging to see the immense eagerness from adult audiences looking to understand how stained glass is made whether through talks or having the opportunity of creatively working with glass themselves. We are delighted to work with glass artist and educator Madeleine Hellier to deliver introduction to stained glass making classes for adults. Taking place in our Education studio space, these immensely popular and meticulously planned day-long courses offer participants the opportunity of creatively exploring this incredible medium by making their own piece, choosing from a lovely, varied selection of coloured glass. Under the expert guidance of Madeleine, participants learn how to cut and solder and create their own stained-glass artwork using the copper foil (Tiffany) method. Feedback from participants to this recent initiative has been fantastic. Artists' talks are another very enjoyable way for audiences to hear from a professional artist like Madeleine,



Artist Lian Bell presenting *Doubles: a new archive* at the More Power to You Study Morning, Hugh Lane Gallery. Photo, Hugh Lane Gallery



Artist Madeleine Hellier in the stained glass room of the Hugh Lane Gallery with participants of the Introduction to Stained Glass Making course. Photo, Hugh Lane Gallery

who has enthusiastically shared her insights into glass art with interactive opportunities for audiences to see actual glass samples and art making tools. The donation to the Gallery by Mary McGrath of Margaret Becker's striking stained-glass panel *St Brigid and Her Geese* was another occasion for a wonderfully engaging artist's talk. Attended by many familiar with Margaret's work, a new audience was also introduced to this award winning stained-glass artist.

Our stained-glass making classes dovetail very well with our collection and also exhibitions such as *More Power to You: Sarah Purser - A Force for Irish Art* (July 2024 - January 2025), which celebrated the immense contribution of artist Sarah Purser to Irish cultural life. Purser founded the stained glass studio An Túr Gloine, which was instrumental in the resurgence of this medium in Ireland. Beautiful miniscule colour wash and ink preparatory studies by Wilhelmina Geddes for the finished *St Colman MacDuagh* stained glass triptych in the Hugh Lane's collection, small painted glass test fragments for other works by Geddes,

studies in charcoal, ink and colourwash for *Cinderella Dressing an Ugly Sister* by Geddes, a watercolour design by Purser for the *St Cormac of Cashel* window as well as finished stained glass panels *The Cock* by Evie Hone and *Outside the Courts* by Michael Healy enabled visitors see and appreciate some of the fascinating stages and variety of artistic styles associated with the making of stained glass art. We were delighted to welcome members of the Glass Society of Ireland who visited this exhibition as part of their professional development day programme.

Our accompanying education programme taking inspiration from Sarah Purser and An Túr Gloine saw imaginative collaborations with contemporary artists. *Tonight it's Tuesday*, an evening of performance and music hosted by artist Isadora Epstein with musician Méabh McKenna, performer Stéphane Béna Hanly, and costumes by artist Amie Egan inventively reimagined characters, stories and memories from Purser's work and life, and from An Túr Gloine. *Glass Poems*, led by poet Grace Wilentz, was inspired by the leadership of Sarah Purser in establishing An Túr Gloine. Participants explored Purser's life and legacy, visited the Hugh Lane's stained glass room, read poetry connected to the medium of stained glass and discussed what it would mean to create 'talking glass' or a 'glass poem', before writing their own original poems in response to these explorations. Artist Lian Bell was invited to present *Doubles: a new archive* as part of our *More Power to You* study morning. This impressive work was developed by Bell in response to archival research she undertook into An Túr Gloine, intertwining the real lives of three distinct pairs of women connected through their relationships to the site of the stained glass workshop in Pembroke Street Upper. Lian's text was accompanied by specially-made glasswork representing tennis balls which, when projected, became magnified colourful spheres illuminating our darkened lectures space, and magically reinforcing how light brings stained glass to life. We also collaborated with Lian Bell on the inaugural *Sarah Purser Municipal Walk* where participants walked together from the Hugh Lane Gallery across the city to sites of significant locations in Purser's life including her studio at Harcourt Terrace, Mespil House, and the workshop of An Túr Gloine.

Building on all of our collaborations and expanding our practical glass art making classes to create opportunities for schoolchildren, young adults and communities to experiment with this challenging medium in a hands-on way, and to be inspired by the incredible examples of stained glass surrounding them, is an exciting prospect.

Jessica O'Donnell is Head of Education and Community Outreach at the Hugh Lane Gallery and an art historian. Her published work includes *Harry Clarke The Eve of Agnes* (2012) and 'A Gorgeous Gallery of Poetic Pictures: Harry Clarke, Harold Jacob and John Keats's The Eve of St Agnes', in *Harry Clarke and Artistic Visions of the New Irish State* (eds. A. Griffith, M. Helmers and R. Kennedy), Irish Academic Press (2018).